MARVEL

ASTONISHING X-MEN #4

SOULE
PACHECO
FONTERIZ
BEREDO

LONDON.

LOGAN IS NOT HIMSELF RIGHT NOW.

HE IS ABOUT TO KILL A GREAT MANY PEOPLE.

ONLY ONE PERSON HERE HAS A CHANCE TO STOP HIM.

POLICE

NOT THE ANGEL. NOT *THIS* VERSION, ANYWAY.

THE ARCHANGEL MIGHT HAVE A CHANCE, BUT WARREN WORTHINGTON III IS *AFRAID* OF THE ARCHANGEL, AND WILL NOT SET HIM FREE.

OH, GOD.

SON OF A--

BISHOP HAS *NO* CHANCE. HE KNOWS THIS--BUT HE'LL STILL TRY HIS BEST.

GOOD FOR HIM.

PSYLOCKE... SHE COULD DO IT, PERHAPS.

BUT SHE IS USING HER POWER ELSEWHERE, AND CANNOT SPARE THE ENERGY TO FIGHT LOGAN.

BAD FOR HER.

STOP HIM! BISHOP, YOU HAVE TO--

BETSY.

PROFESSOR? HOW...HOW CAN YOU BE HERE? YOU'RE DEAD.

I'M DEAD, PSYLOCKE, BUT I'M NOT GONE. THERE IS NO TIME TO EXPLAIN.

LISTEN, AND SURVIVE.

IT'S THE END OF THE WORLD, BISHOP... IT'S THE END OF THE WORLD!

NOT YET.

SECURE SUPERINTENDENT BLAKE. ONCE HE'S CLEAR, IT'S WEAPONS FREE. TAKE THEM ALL OUT.

YOU MUST FIGHT. YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE WHO CAN.

I CAN'T, XAVIER.

I'VE SENT ROGUE AND THE OTHERS TO THE ASTRAL PLANE.

IT'S TAKING ALL MY POWER TO HOLD THEM THERE.

IF I LET GO, THEY'LL BE TRAPPED.

THEY ALREADY ARE, BETSY--BUT YES. THE MENTAL LINK MUST BE MAINTAINED. I WILL TAKE ON A PORTION OF THE PSYCHIC BURDEN.

THAT WILL FREE YOU TO FIGHT LOGAN.

GAH!

WEAK PULSE, BUT IT'S THERE. HE'S ALIVE.

THEN GET HIM *OUT* OF HERE!

I CAN'T JUST...I DON'T KNOW IF THIS IS **REAL**. YOU COULD BE ONE OF THE **SHADOW KING'S** TRICKS.

I UNDERSTAND. BUT LOGAN WILL BE DONE WITH BISHOP IN MOMENTS, AND THEN HE'LL COME FOR YOU.

TOLD YOU, BISHOP...

THWM

...IT'S THE END OF THE WORLD.

AGH!

CHOOSE, PSYLOCKE. WILL YOU STAND HERE TREMBLING LIKE A COW IN THE SLAUGHTER-HOUSE, WAITING TO FEEL HIS CLAWS INSIDE YOU...

...OR WILL YOU FIGHT?

KRRNG

NNGH!

TOO...

...SLOW...

KRRCK

...OLD MAN.

I'M NOT OLD.

I AM ETERNAL!

SLSH

NNGH!

I WANTED YOUR MIND, BETSY... BUT I'LL SETTLE FOR YOUR BODY.

THAT'S ALL RIGHT, *FAROUK.*

YOU WANT MY MIND?

WHA--?

"HAVE IT."

ACT I

ASTONISHING X-MEN

LIFE OF X
PART FOUR

THE DEADLY GAME BETWEEN AMAHL FAROUK--THE PSYCHIC PARASITE KNOWN AS THE SHADOW KING--AND THE SPIRIT OF DECEASED X-MEN FOUNDER CHARLES XAVIER HAS TAKEN ITS FIRST CASUALTY. LOGAN HAS FALLEN. HIS BODY, WITH ALL ITS MURDEROUS SKILL, IS NOW UNDER THE SHADOW KING'S CONTROL. HIS SOUL IS TRAPPED, FOREVER, IN AN ENDLESS LOOP ON THE ASTRAL PLANE.

FOUR PIECES REMAIN ON THE BOARD: FANTOMEX, MYSTIQUE, ROGUE AND GAMBIT. THEY ARE ALL CAUGHT IN THEIR OWN ILLUSIONS ON THE REALITY-WARPING ASTRAL PLANE, BEING MANIPULATED ENDLESSLY BY XAVIER AND FAROUK AS EACH WORKS TO GAIN THE UPPER HAND.

IN LONDON, PSYLOCKE MAINTAINS A PSYCHIC LINK ALLOWING THE X-MEN ON THE ASTRAL PLANE TO FIGHT THEIR DESPERATE BATTLE AGAINST THE SHADOW KING. ANGEL AND BISHOP ARE STANDING GUARD, FENDING OFF A BRITISH COUNTER-TERROR TEAM UNDER ORDERS TO SUBDUE THE MUTANTS BEFORE THEY DESTROY THE CITY. AND THEN...

...LOGAN.

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THE ASTRAL PLANE.

MM.

WHAT IS THIS, *MYSTIQUE?*

KRUG PRIVATE CUVÉE, FANTOMEX.

NOT THE *MOST* EXPENSIVE CHAMPAGNE EVER MADE, BUT CLOSE. I'VE ONLY TASTED IT ONCE BACK IN THE REAL WORLD, BUT HERE, THAT DOESN'T MATTER.

I CAN HAVE AS MUCH AS I WANT.

NO, NOT THE CHAMPAGNE-- ALTHOUGH IT *IS* QUITE LOVELY.

THIS PLACE. WHAT IS THIS *PLACE?*

AN APARTMENT I ONCE HAD IN MADRIPOOR. BACK IN THE '20s. I LOVED IT. A WONDERFUL TIME TO BE A CRIMINAL.

OH, I HAVE NO DOUBT. NEXT TIME I AM CAUGHT UP IN A TIME-TRAVEL CAPER, I'LL DO MY BEST TO GET STRANDED IN THE JAZZ AGE.

BUT PERHAPS I DO NOT MAKE MYSELF CLEAR:

WE ARE STILL IN THE ASTRAL PLANE. I KNOW THIS. WE CAME IN WITH ROGUE, LOGAN AND THAT LYING THIEF ***GAMBIT.***

WE SEPARATED WHEN THE SHADOW KING PRESENTED US WITH THREE EVER-SO-MYSTERIOUS DOORS.

I EXPECTED SOME SORT OF HELLSCAPE BUILT FROM MY GREATEST FEARS. NOT A PALACE IN THE SKY.

THE ASTRAL PLANE IS WHATEVER YOU WANT IT TO BE. I WANT IT TO BE THIS.

FAROUK WILL FIND US EVENTUALLY--I CAN FEEL HIM SNIFFING AROUND THIS REALITY FORTRESS EVEN NOW.

THEN, CERTAINLY...PAIN, AGONY, TERROR. BUT UNTIL ***THEN...***

...I INTEND TO ***THOROUGHLY*** ENJOY MYSELF.

THIS FALL WOULD KILL MOST MEN.

LUCAS BISHOP SHOULD BE SCREAMING IN TERROR, HIS MANY, MANY LIVES FLASHING BEFORE HIS EYES.

BUT LUCAS BISHOP IS NOT MOST MEN.

HE TAKES THE KINETIC ENERGY HIS FALL HAS BUILT UP WITHIN HIS BODY...

...AND HE *CHANGES* IT.

KTHOOOOOM

TO *LIGHT* ENERGY. TO *SONIC* ENERGY.

ALL OF HIS MOVEMENT, BLED AWAY BIT BY BIT.

AS HE DOES THIS, HE SLOWS.

AND LANDS, A FALLEN LEAF.

GOOD ENOUGH.

HE COULD DO THE SAME TRICK FOR LOGAN.

AAAAAAAHH!

HE COULD.

OR HE COULD NOT.

KRRK

NOW, FAROUK, I KNOW YOU'RE GONNA HEAL FROM THAT, BUT IT'S GONNA TAKE YOU A WHILE.

IN THE MEANTIME, WE'LL TAKE THIS BODY, AND LOCK IT UP *TIGHT.* THIS LITTLE TRICK OF YOURS IS *DONE.* SO WHY DON'T YOU JUST GET THE HELL OUT OF LOGAN AND--

ドドド

THE ASTRAL PLANE.

MMM. I NEEDED THIS, *REMY.*

YOU AN' ME BOTH, *CHÈRE.*

GAMBIT LOVES *ROGUE.*

ROGUE LOVES GAMBIT.

BUT THERE IS LOVE THAT IS *NOW,* AND THERE IS LOVE THAT IS *THEN.*

I CAN'T REMEMBER THE LAST TIME I JUST RELAXED.

I KNOW, DARLIN'.

FOR ROGUE, IT WAS *THEN.* FOR GAMBIT...

'SBEEN A LONG TIME.

...IT IS ALWAYS *NOW.*

NO!

IT'S ALL RIGHT, *ANNA MARIE.* I'M OKAY. NO PAIN. DIDN'T FEEL A *THING.*

NO, I LIE.

I FELT *PLENTY.*

GAMBIT, *PLEASE.* YOU KNOW WHAT'S HAPPENING HERE. THE SHADOW KING'S GIVING US WHAT HE THINKS WE WANT.

PUTTING US *TOGETHER,* IN THIS SEXY DAMN HOT TUB, HALF NAKED, AND LETTING ME *TOUCH* YOU WITHOUT MY POWERS STEALING YOUR LIFE FORCE.

DON'T YOU SEE? IT'S JUST ANOTHER *TRAP.*

SO?

YOU DON'T GIVE THE ORDERS HERE.

THAT'S NOT WHAT I MEAN. THAT MAN DOWN THERE, THE ONE YOU THINK YOU JUST KILLED?

HE DOES NOT DIE.

WHAT LOGAN MEANT: THE BRIGHT RAZOR-FLASH OF CLAWS DISAPPEARING INTO FLESH. THE WANING PRESSURE OF ARTERIAL BLOOD.

THE SOUND OF A PILE OF GUTS AS IT SLOPS ONTO THE GROUND.

LOGAN WAS TALKING ABOUT *MURDER.*

GRRRAAGH!

WELL, *THAT'S* SORTED.

SORRY ABOUT YOUR MATE THERE, ANGEL, BUT IT HAD TO BE DONE.

WHEN ANIMALS GO FERAL, THEY GET *PUT DOWN.*

GET YOUR MEN OUT OF THERE *NOW.*

IN THE OLD DAYS, LOGAN USED TO TELL PEOPLE HE WAS THE BEST THERE WAS AT WHAT HE DID.

AND HE WAS *RIGHT.*

AHAHAHAHAHA!

OH, HELL!

I TRIED TO WARN YOU.

FWSSH

DON'T WORRY. I'LL SAVE THEM.

WHAT NOW, BOYS? WHAT NOW?

KRRSH

NNGH.

DO...DO YOU NEED *HELP?* ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?

OH, THAT'S SO *KIND* OF YOU TO ASK.

I THINK WE'LL BE *GREAT* FRIENDS.

SET ME FREEEEEEE...

SET ME FREEEEEEE...

SO? GAMBIT, IF WE LOSE OURSELVES IN THE SHADOW KING'S REALITY, HE'LL STEAL OUR SOULS. HE'LL TAKE OUR BODIES BACK IN THE REAL WORLD.

I AIN'T SAYIN' WE CONJURE UP OURSELVES A PRIEST AND GET MARRIED HERE AND NOW, ROGUE. I KNOW WE HAVE WORK TO DO.

"AN' I KNOW IT'S UNFAIR FOR US TO SIT BACK WHILE THE OTHERS TRY TO SAVE THE DAY.

"BUT MY GOD, DARLIN'..."

...THE OPPORTUNITY.

I KNOW, ***REMY.*** BUT I DON'T WANT TO GET BACK ON THAT MERRY-GO-ROUND WITH YOU AGAIN. WE'VE TRIED SO MANY TIMES.

IT JUST ***DOESN'T WORK,*** AND EVERY TIME WE END IT, IT FEELS LIKE MY HEART'S NEVER GONNA GET BACK TOGETHER AGAIN.

SURE. BUT YOU GOTTA ASK YOURSELF, *CHÈRE*--MAYBE THIS IS A SHADOW KING TRAP, OR MAYBE WE MADE UP THIS PLACE AND TURNED OFF OUR POWERS OURSELVES.

EITHER WAY, LADY...SOMEWHERE, DEEP INSIDE...

"...THIS MUST BE WHAT WE ***WANT.***"

AND THEN WE GO SAVE THE DAY?

AND THEN WE GO SAVE THE DAY.

"LET'S JUST..."

...STEAL THIS MOMENT.

MM.

UH...

THAT WAS DIFFERENT THAN THE LAST TIME.

YES, WELL, THIS TIME I'M NOT PRETENDING TO BE *PSYLOCKE.*

SO THIS IS RAVEN DARKHOLME BEING *HERSELF?* WHO *IS* SUCH A CREATURE, I WONDER?

LET'S FIND OUT.

...ROGUE?

HELLO.
UGH.
HMM.
WHAT THE--
BEFORE YOU ASK, YES, I AM ACTUALLY CHARLES XAVIER, YES, YOU ARE STILL ON THE ASTRAL PLANE, AND NO, THIS IS NOT ONE OF THE SHADOW KING'S TRAPS.
I PROMISE YOU THERE IS NO IMMEDIATE DANGER.
PLEASE SAVE YOUR QUESTIONS UNTIL I HAVE HAD A CHANCE TO EXPLAIN. WE HAVE LITTLE TIME.
NO, CHARLES, I AIN'T GONNA WAIT. I HAVE A QUESTION I NEED ANSWERED *NOW.*
WHERE THE HELL IS *GAMBIT?*
AH. GAMBIT.

"I'M SORRY, ROGUE."

I TRIED.

"I COULDN'T SAVE HIM."

HEH.

TO BE CONTINUED...

ZONE